

THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

BY MAXIMILIAN J. RUDWIN

THE Synagogue of Satan is of greater antiquity and potency than the Church of God. The fear of a malign being was earlier in operation and more powerful in its appeal among primitive peoples than the love of a benign being. Fear, it should be remembered, was the first incentive of religious worship. Propitiation of harmful powers was the first phase of all sacrificial rites. This is perhaps the meaning of the old Gnostic tradition that when Solomon was summoned from his tomb and asked, "Who first named the name of God?" he answered, "The Devil."

Furthermore, every religion that preceded Christianity was a form of devil-worship in the eyes of the new faith. The early Christians actually believed that all pagans were devil-worshippers inasmuch as all pagan gods were in Christian eyes disguised demons who caused themselves to be adored under different names in different countries. It was believed that the spirits of hell took the form of idols, working through them, as St. Thomas Aquinas said, certain marvels which excited the wonder and admiration of their worshippers (*Summa theologica* II.ii.94).

This viewpoint was not confined to the Christians. It has ever been a custom among men to send to the Devil all who do not belong to their own particular caste, class or cult. Each nation or religion has always claimed the Deity for itself and assigned the Devil to other nations and religions. Zoroaster described alien worshippers as children of the Divas, which, in biblical parlance, is equivalent to sons of Belial. The Greeks ascribed the origin of the Scythian race to the Devil, while to Jewish eyes all Gentile races were demonic. In considering other religions as "devilish," Christianity did nothing more than accept the belief of its parent faith. If this viewpoint were confirmed, it would be safe to say

that the believers in Beelzebub outnumber to this day the worshippers of the Blessed Lord. The Christians, as far as numerical strength is concerned, play even now a rather insignificant part as compared with the followers of other religions, since only a fourth of the population of this earth is Christian.

The belief in the eternal damnation of all non-Christians is not greatly stressed nowadays. But the medieval Church was emphatic in its assertion that all who did not seek salvation in its bosom served Satan. Romance and history combined in representing those outside the pale of the Church as the personal vassals of Satan, who worked his deceptions among them. Jews, Turks and heretics, in addition to the heathen, were believed in all Christian lands to be allies of the infernal powers. The Jews were supposed by the Christians to worship the Devil and to accumulate their wealth with his aid. The Jewish synagogues were regarded by Christians as temples of Satan. The belief that every Jew wears horns has persisted in certain Christian circles to the present day. In the opinion of Emmanuel Malynski, a contemporary Polish-French writer, the Talmud has been inspired by the Spirit of Evil.

The Saracens were also regarded in the Middle Ages as living under the yoke of the demons, with whom they are even identified in *le Charroi de Nîmes*, one of the French medieval epic poems called *chansons de geste*. The Devil and the Turk were commonly thought in the Middle Ages to be closely related and often joined together. Martin Luther also called all Turks devils.

Similarly, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, heretics were the spawn of Satan. Heresy was traced by the Church to the blowing of Beelzebub's bellows into the ears of humanity. The Albigenses were called by the Catholics "members of the Devil," and the Waldenses were considered confederates of the powers of hell.

When the Church, at the advent of the Reformation, was divided against itself, each part accused the other of serving Satan. Catholics and Protestants never wearied in accusing each other of being influenced by the spirits of hell. Priests taught that Protestants were devil-worshippers and magicians (Samuel Harsnett: *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, 1603). The French Huguenots, among other Protestant bodies, were believed by the Catholics to be on intimate terms with the Devil.

The Protestants, on their part, stoutly maintained that the

Catholics were in the service of Satan. The Reformers attributed the miracles of the Catholic saints to an infernal origin, just as the Jews had believed the miracles of Christ to have been performed with the aid of Beelzebub (Matt. xii.24). The Calvinist Calhhill, in his answer to Martiall's *Treatise of the Cross* (1564), maintained that the Catholics were in reality serving Satan, while they believed that they worshipped the Lord. Martin Luther similarly considered the Catholic Church as an emanation of the Evil Spirit. The Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church was, in his eyes, the whole host of wickedness spoken of in the Book of Revelations. "Alongside of God's sacred Church," the German reformer affirmed, "the Devil has built his chapel, and keeps up in it his ape-like play with holy water" and other Catholic ceremonies.¹ The Protestant leaders supposed Roman ecclesiaticism to be tainted by a connection with the powers of hell. They saw the Devil, in his traditional form of horns, hoof and tail, standing with an immense bellows behind the Pope, the cardinals and the other prelates of the Roman Church, and filling them with hostile plans against the reformed teachings. Luther meant no metaphor when he described the Catholic clergy as the Devil's priests, and the monk's hood as the proper garment of Satan himself; and Melanchthon was deeply in earnest when he called the Papists the slavish imitators of magicians and necromancers whom he termed the agents of hell. The Jesuits were considered as the most "devilish" of all Catholic monks. Phineas Fletcher, in his poem, *The Apollyonists* (1627), identified the Jesuits with the spirits of hell by naming them after the biblical demon, Apollyon. In Béranger's belief, the Jesuits even outdo the demons of darkness in wickedness. The Pontiff in the Vatican himself was accused of diabolical relations in the writings of the Protestants. He was believed to have been crowned by Satan and to represent hell rather than heaven on earth. Others went so far as to maintain that the Pontiff of Rome and the Prince of the Pit were identical. Still others saw in the head of the Roman Church Antichrist in person.²

¹ Victor Hugo, in his novel *les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), deduced from the idea that Satan had taken a fancy to the Catholics and sought their company a great deal the belief that the Devil was more Catholic than Protestant.

² The pope is described as Antichrist in Leconte de Lisle's poem "la Mort du moine" (1895). An interesting story about the relation between the head of the hierarchy of hell and the head of the Catholic hierarchy is Richard Garnett's "The Demon Pope" (1888), reprinted in the present writer's anthology of *Devil Stories* (1921).

The Protestant sects, warring among themselves, accused each other of connections with the powers of darkness. The Lutherans gave the Calvinists the rather unflattering name of "white devils." The Methodists considered the Presbyterians as devil-worshippers. "I perceive that your God is my devil," said John Wesley, the founder of free-will Methodism, to George Whitefield, the leader of the Calvinistic Methodists, one day in the course of an argument about predestination. The poet Swinburne considered all Puritans agents of hell. Judge Rutherford, the present head of "Russellism," declared the whole organized Church, Protestant as well as Papist, to be "Satan's organization." Thus not only all non-Christians but even the Christians themselves, if we are to credit their invectives against each other, belong to the Devil rather than the Deity.

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Apart from this diabolization of other men's deities as a result of denominational differences and sectarian strife, there actually were within the Church, down to the thirteenth century, many heretical sects, who fully deserved the term of devil-worshippers.³ Among the groups who continued within Christianity the traditions of Persian Magism, Gnosticism and Manichæism, we may mention the Priscillianists of Spain, the Paulicians, the Bogomiles, the Catharists, and the Albigenses. The German Luciferians, of the thirteenth century, expressed their adoration for Lucifer in the belief that he had been unjustly banished from heaven and pronounced anathema against St. Michael, his conqueror. The French woman novelist, George Sand, puts her belief in the unjust treatment dealt out to the Devil by his celestial comrades into the mouth of the followers of Johann Huss in Bohemia, whom she designates as Lollards, a term really applied to the followers of Wycliffe. In her novel, *Consuelo* (1842-43), she tells us that

"In the opinion of the Lollards, Satan was not the enemy of

³ The Devil has always counted his admirers and adorers even among the orthodox Christians. Many devout church folk, wishing to be on good terms with both parties, offer their allegiance to both the Lord and Lucifer. An English preacher of American extraction, M. D. Conway, tells of a Christian lady residing in Hampshire, England, who made her children bow their heads whenever they mentioned the name of the Devil. When asked the reason for her queer conduct, she replied: "It is safer." He also relates the story of a French peasant woman who was found one day in a church kneeling before a marble group. When she was warned by the priest that she was worshipping the wrong figure, namely, Beelzebub, she replied: "Never mind, it is well to have friends on both sides." (Cf. M. D. Conway: *Demonology and Devil-Lore*, 2 vols., London, 1879, II, 13.)

the human race, but, on the contrary, its protector and patron. They held that he was a victim of injustice and jealousy. According to them, the archangel Michael and the other celestial powers who had precipitated him into the abyss, were the real demons, while Lucifer, Beelzebub, Ashtaroth, Astarte, and all the monsters of hell, were innocence and light themselves. They believed that the reign of Michael and his glorious host would soon come to an end, and that the Devil would be restored and reinstated in heaven with his accursed myrmidons. They paid him an impious worship and accosted each other by saying, *Celui à qui on a fait tort te salue*—that is to say, He who has been misunderstood and unjustly condemned, salute thee—that is, protect and assist thee."

Among contemporary devil-worshippers we will mention the Yezidis, a sect living in ancient Assyria, on the slopes of the mountain called Djebel Makub, who still worship the Devil as creator of the world and author of evil, the black Jews in Cochin, British India, and the Voodoos of the West Indies and Haiti. There are infernal cults also in the North of China, in Africa, near Lake Tschad, in the Solomon Islands, and in the New Hebrides.^{3a}

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The members of the witch-cult were equally, though perhaps less justly, regarded as devil-worshippers by the Church. It is generally believed that the Witches' Sabbath, as the reunion of Satan and his worshippers was called, applied particularly to the members of the gentler sex, had no basis in reality. The general assumption among the enemies of the Catholic Church is that medieval witchcraft was an invention of the Inquisition. Modern historical research, however, has established the fact that witchcraft was not wholly an imaginary affair, but had its foundation in solid reality.⁴ It should be added, though, that the mass of superstition built around it had its inception in the imagination of demented hags taken and tormented by the Inquisition.

The witch-cult was a lineal descendant of the old indigenous heathen religions that covered Europe before the advent of Christianity and that were not easily wiped out by the religion imported from the East. Even for many centuries after the conversion of the European peoples to Christianity, the new faith was only a

^{3a} On the Yezidis, consult Isga Joseph's thesis, *Devil-Worship*. (Boston, 1919.) See also R. M. Macdonall's article "Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides" in *Cornhill's Magazine*, vol. LXIV (1928), pp. 178-92.

⁴ The historicity of the Witches' Sabbath is maintained by Miss Alice Murray in her well documented thesis, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford, 1921).

thin veneer. In many districts, the masses refused for a long time to abandon their pagan rites. Men and women, in particular living far from the advanced areas, tenaciously clung to their ancient beliefs and observances. Inasmuch as the Christians identified the old indigenous gods with the devils and evil spirits of the new religion, their ritual was decreed as devil-worship, and their priests and priestesses were branded as wizards and witches. The rites of ancient worship, which now came to be known as witch-cults, were chiefly devoted to the fertility of field, fold and family and by their "obscenity" scandalized the people whose very ancestors had practised the same ceremonies in pagan times.

The witch-cult may thus be considered as primarily a survival of the old fertility ritual. In fact, we can discover in the Witches' Sabbath many vestigial remains of the old fertility worship. The Devil of the Witches' Sabbath is successor to the ancient god, who may be recognized, in a degenerate form, by all the disguises which he assumed at these nocturnal ceremonies. It is well known that, on such occasions, the Devil appeared most frequently in the form of a goat, the animal sacred to Priapus, the Greek god of vegetal and animal fertility. The goat also served as the witch's steed when she repaired to the Sabbath. The broom or stick which was likewise employed by her as a mount and which was also ridden in the dances of the Witches' Sabbath, is similarly a fertility symbol.⁵ Furthermore, the unholy ecstasy and unlicensed revelry with which the Witches' Sabbath terminated should be explained as a survival of the physical unions which formed part of the ancient fertility worship.

Next to the fertility rites, the ancient fire-worship may be recognized in the Witches' Sabbath. The witches worshipped their god as the universal father and protector, and such paternal attributes are generally applied to the ancient sun-divinity. Fire figured prominently at the Witches' Sabbath, as it did in all pre-Christian festivals. The torches, with which the gathering-places of the witches were lighted, had their origin in the Beltane and solar festivals. The worshippers held candles to the Devil when he performed certain rites, and thus the expression originated, "to hold a candle to the Devil." A candle was also carried in the witch-cult by the Devil himself, frequently on his head, in his quality as Lucifer.

⁵ The broom, however, may also represent the sweeping storm, which was the habitation of the Devil. On the medieval stage, the Devil was often represented with a besom in his hand.

The witch-cult was also brought into connection with the weird superstition of the wild hunt, the rout of restless, wandering spirits, which was spread in all the European countries.⁶ The witches repaired to their Sabbath on air-minded brooms or goats, just as the avenging maidens of Woden flew through the night air on magic steeds or in the form of swans. The Devil, who conveyed the women to their midnight convocations, was the successor to the Wild Huntsman. Popular belief mentions Diana, the goddess of the hunt in classical mythology, and Herodias, the wicked woman of biblical history, as leaders in this nocturnal air-flight. The "Canon Episcopi," of the ninth century, had already associated the Latin goddess and the Judean queen with the women who flew at midnight through the air. The *Malleus maleficarum* or *Witch Hammer* written by the two inquisitors, H. Institoris and J. Sprenger, in Germany toward the end of the fifteenth century, also mentioned Diana and Herodias as leading the wild women during their nocturnal trips in mid-air by the order of the Devil. No lesser persons than Albertus Magnus and Alexander of Hales put their faith in this superstition. Turrecremata, the Spanish commentator, who lived in the fifteenth century, expressed his doubts as to this belief, on the ground that Diana never existed and that Herodias was in all likelihood not permitted to leave hell in order to join the midnight air-processions.

The witch-queen Herodias, the Wandering Jewess, the counterpart of the Wandering Jew in Christian mythology, who leads the midnight revels of devils and witches in medieval superstition, is not, as is generally assumed, the wife of Herod Antipas and the mother of Salome. The idea that both mother and daughter were afflicted with the curse of eternal wandering because of their sinful love for the Baptist, which we find in Heinrich Heine's poem *Atta Troll* (ch.xix), has no foundation in popular belief. The Herodias who figures as leader of the medieval wild hunt is Mariamne, the wife of Herod the Great. She is believed to have brought down upon herself the wrath of the Lord for her contemptuous treatment of the Magi, when they passed Jerusalem on their way to the manger of Christ. It is said that she refused to go to the window

⁶ Consult H. Plischke's thesis, *Die Sage vom wilden Heere* (Eilenburg, 1914). A beautiful description of the wild army will be found in Heine's poem *Atta Troll* (1842). In Bürger's ballad, "Der wilde Jäger" (1786), the poet gives expression to his indignation over the oppression exercised by some nobles upon their subjects.

to see them, pretending that she was busy sweeping the room. For this reason, she was doomed to wander through the air at night riding on a broom-stick. Legend thus links her with Epiphany Day, and on the Eve of this day, which, in the South of Germany, is not very much different from Shrove Tuesday or Carnival Day, Herodias-Berchta is led in procession through the streets riding on a broom-stick.⁷ This fact points to an identification of the Judean queen with the Germanic goddess Berchta (Perchta, Bertha or Hertha), who, it will be remembered, is an appellation given in Southern Germany and in Switzerland to a spiritual being who probably corresponds to the Hulda (Holda or Holla) of Northern Germany. Frau Holda (Holde or Holle) is, in reality, an old goddess, indeed the chief goddess Frigg or Fria, the queen of heaven, the goddess of marriage, as Mother Earth is the goddess of agriculture, fertility, and growth. Friday is named after this goddess. In the country districts of Germany to this day, all marriages are celebrated on Friday. Holda signifies "the gracious, the benign one." This Frigaholda—even that name appears in an old manuscript—is the patroness of spinning maidens. She punishes idleness and slovenliness in spinning, and awards diligence and care. During the "Twelve Nights," the distaff and spindle were not to be touched on pain of inviting the wrath of Holda.⁸

In Thuringia, Frau Holda or Holla rides with the wild hunt on Walpurgis Night. In other parts of Germany, an image of this goddess, on her flying bed of snow, is still cursed, scourged, and burnt as Herodias. Thus the Judean queen, after having been identified with the ancient Germanic goddess, was assigned to be a companion to Diana, the savage goddess of hunting in Roman mythology, who, in medieval belief, assumed the character of a witch, and both were turned into wandering spirits eternally engaged in a wild hunt.⁹

⁷ Consult MacCallum's article "The Great Blessing," in the periodical *Asia* for July, 1927, for Greek Orthodox customs on Epiphany Day, the festival of the baptism of Jesus. In Italy, the peasants, who do not understand the Greek term *epiphania*, have turned it into a fairy or witch Befana, just as an English sailor calls Bellerophon, Billy Ruffian. This Befana, who in Italian popular belief has been identified with Diana, wanders in the winter nights much in the manner of Odin in Scandinavian mythology.

⁸ See B. Waschnitius: *Percht, Holda und verwante Gestalten*. Wien, 1913. (Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akademie der Wissenschaften.)

⁹ For further study of the legend of Herodias, consult Jacob Grimm: *Teutonic Mythology*. Transl. from the 6th edition of the German by J. S. Stallybrass. London, 1880-88; Karl Simrock: *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie mit Einschluss der nordischen*. 5 Aufl. Bonn, 1878; E. K. Chambers: *The Medieval Stage*. Oxford, 1903.

Medieval witchcraft is likewise a survival of pre-Christian magic. It may perhaps be traced, as Gustav Freytag suggests, to the cult of a group of dark demons, who figured in the paganism of the old Nords and who were represented as engaged in an eternal war against the bright deities.¹⁰ The priests of these gloomy gods performed their sacred rites by night and sacrificed to their titular spirits dark-colored animals of all kinds. These priests also possessed the power, through the magic agency of their gods, to blast crops and to destroy flocks and herds. Similar beliefs seemed also to exist in ancient Rome. Pliny tells us that in his country laws were enacted against injury to crops by "fascination." The medieval witch or wizard was supposed to possess the power to harm both beast and man. In popular belief, the Devil and the sorcerer or sorceress united in a contract of witchcraft, as the term was understood in the Middle Ages,¹¹ joined their various powers of doing evil to inflict calamities upon the persons and property, the fortune and fame, of innocent human beings. The witch was especially dreaded in the Middle Ages. She was known as a compounder of philters and poisons, a caster of spells, a wicked woman, and a hideous hag.

The Devil also bestowed his power of physical tergiversation upon the witch and warlock, who thus could transform themselves into all sorts of animals. French witches generally changed themselves into wildcats, whereas the British witches preferred to be transformed into hares.¹² The wizards liked to crawl into the skins of wolves, but, at certain of their assemblies, they also changed themselves into stags, which explains the origin of the expression "stag parties."

The witch organization permeated the lower classes in France, Germany and England. The French historian, Jules Michelet, in

¹⁰ Cf. Gustav Freytag: *The Devil in Germany During the Sixteenth Century*. Transl. from the German by Wm. A. Hervey (New York, 1893), pp. 7-8. This essay originally formed the second chapter of the second volume of *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit* (1859).

¹¹ The contract of witchcraft differed from the regular devil-compact in so far as it was not witnessed by an instrument written and sealed. The witches and their companions went over to the worship of the Devil and acknowledged him as their lord merely by giving him the oath of submission or by performing a certain act of homage, such as a kiss on a certain part of his body.

¹² Witches can also transform animals into human beings. A witch changes her cat into a cavalier in Théophile Gautier's poem *Albertus* (1830).

his book, *la Sorcière* (1862),¹³ attributed the spread of witchcraft among the lower masses to the despair of the poor at finding that even the Church, long their friend and protector, had become feudal and tyrannical, even more tyrannical than their lay oppressors. He saw in the Witches' Sabbath the first glimpses of women's rights, of the equality of sexes, and, in fact, of all modern social reforms. The Black Mass was, in his opinion, "the protest of the oppressed masses, the symbol of the approaching freedom, the communion of rebellion." This author represents magic and sorcery as Nature's protest against the Church's proscriptions and the final victory of *terra mater* after centuries of struggles and atrocious persecutions.

The predominance of women over men in the witch-cult is easily explained by the fact that women are more conservative than men and hold more firmly to ancient beliefs and traditions. Jules Michelet, however, maintains that so many members of the weaker sex surrendered themselves to Satanism in medieval times for the reason that Satan lifted woman from the low position in which she had been held by the Church. His portrait of the medieval witch contains more poetry than history. In his opinion, she is the forerunner of the modern social reformer and natural scientist. She had neither father nor mother, nor son, nor husband, nor family. She was a marvel, an aerolith, alighted no one knew whence. Her place of abode was in spots impracticable, in a forest of brambles, on a wild moor where thorn and thistle forbade approach. She passed the night under an old cromlech. If any one found her there, she was isolated by the common dread; she was surrounded, as it were, by a ring of fire, and yet she was a woman. This very life of hers, dreadful though it appeared, tightened and braced her woman's energy. "You may see her endowed with two gifts. One is the inspiration of lucid frenzy, which, in its several degrees, becomes poesy, second sight, depth of insight, cunning simplicity of speech, the power especially of believing in yourself through all your delusions. . . . From this gift flows the other, the sublime power of unaided conception." But now the witch has nothing to say. "Her ashes have been scattered to the winds." She has perished, chiefly by the progress of those very sciences which began with her through the physician, the naturalist, for whom she had once toiled.

¹³ Mr. A. R. Allinson has translated this book into English under the title, *The Sorceress, A Study in Middle Age Superstition*. The translation appeared in 1904 in Paris.

The witch groups were organized in worshipping congregations governed by boards known as "covens." The leader was believed to have divine inspiration by his followers, diabolic inspiration by outsiders. He was called the Devil, and in the ceremonial processions he brought up the rear, thus giving rise to the old saying, "the Devil take the hindmost." Mr. R. Lowe Thompson, in his recently published book, *The History of the Devil*, maintains that the leader in the witch-cult was first a magician—a magician disguised as an animal with horns and tail, who afterwards became a priest. When, in his later rôle as a god, he was dethroned by Christianity and driven underground, he turned into the lord of the underworld and king of the dead and finally into the Devil, as the medieval witch knew him. The Reverend Montague Summers in his recent book, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*, maintains that the Devil "was present in person for the hideous adoration of his besotted worshippers."^{13a}

According to popular belief, the witch repaired to her secret tryst with Satan in the following manner: She removed every stitch of clothing, sat down on a broom stick, took three swallows from a liquid contained in a black bottle, immediately flew up the chimney and was gone. If she employed the goat as a mount, the witch anointed her body with a certain oil which endowed her with the power to fly through the air with the rapidity of a flash of lightning.

The meetings of the witches were held at fixed spots, chiefly in desolate heaths and hills (like the Broken or Blocksberg in Germany¹⁴), sometimes near the water and often at some old stand-

^{13a} The book of this English clergyman represents wholly the medieval point of view. Mr. Summers shows himself in his work as an uncompromising inquisitor who would be only too glad to send heretics and "witches" to the stake if the secular authorities still executed the decrees of the Holy Office."

See also his book *The Geography of Witchcraft*. (London, 1927.)

¹⁴ Brocken is the Roman Mons Bructerus, the highest peak in the Harz mountains, in fact in Northern Germany. It is 3,745 feet above the sea-level. Old tradition has it that on this mountain witches, devils and all uncanny creatures meet for a great revelry on the night between April 30 and May 1. This tradition seems to go back to the old heathen spring festival, which the early Christians considered as "devilish." Goethe selected the Brocken for the place of one of the scenes in *Faust*, a fact which has greatly added to the popularity of this mountain. Its summit may now be reached during the summer months by a mountain railway, starting from Wernigerode. In winter the ascent, necessarily on foot, is sometimes difficult on account of the snow which often reaches a depth of several feet. Blocksberg is the popular name for the Brocken.

ing stone or megalithic monument. All around the meeting-place boiling cauldrons served as torches.

Spanish witches did not congregate, according to popular belief, in their own country, but across the seas in South America. Spain was too holy to permit a Witches' Sabbath to be held on its soil. The Spanish witches, unlike their sisters in other countries, did not mount on brooms or goats to fly to their revels with the devils, but repaired to their trans-Atlantic meeting-place in boats which sailed so fast that in three hours they travelled across the ocean and back again without ever being detected by their unsuspecting husbands. They must necessarily have had a strong wind at their command, for it was none other than the Devil himself who bellied out the sails of their boats (Prosper Mérimée: *les Sorcierès espagnoles*, 1829).

The main reunions of the witches occurred on May Eve (April 30), which was sometimes known as Toodmas in Great Britain and as Walpurgis Night in Germany,^{14a} and on November Eve (October 31), called Hallowe'en. As a later addition, midway between these nights of power, we have witches' gatherings on Candlemas (February 2), and on Lammas, otherwise called the Gule of August (August 1). At each of the great assemblies, there were two gatherings. One was the "Sabbath,"^{14b} a public meeting of all the witches in the district, who feasted, danced and celebrated their rites, worshipped their god, and indulged in all sorts of orgies. The other meeting, the "esbat," which was not open to the public, was a sort of business council at which the affairs of the cult were discussed by the officials, and the more esoteric rites were carried out by skilled hands. These secret ceremonies included blood sacrifices of creatures—such as a cat, a dog, a red cock, or an unbaptized child. In addition to the four great assemblies, smaller gatherings were held every week. It was believed that the devil-

^{14a} Walpurga was an English saint, who accompanied her uncle St. Boniface to Germany in the eighth century to aid him in the foundation of religious houses. Her commemoration day fell on the 1st of May, the date of the great heathen spring festival, which was decried by the early Christians as devil-worship. In consequence, by a strange iron of coincidence, the name of the good saint became associated with that "unholy carnival" into which the Christian imagination transformed the May Day ceremonies. See the scene "Walpurgisnacht" in the First Part of Goethe's *Faust*.

^{14b} The word "Sabbath," it should be remembered, has no relation to the Jewish day of rest, but is most probably derived from the French word *s'esbattre*, which means "to frolic." In contrast to the old Puritan Sabbath, the Witches' Sabbath contained elements of joy.



THE WITCHES' SABBATH. (After Picart)

worshippers met on Thursdays to forestall the Mohammedans, who gathered for the adoration of their god on Fridays; of the Jews, who observed their day of rest on Saturdays; and of the Christians, who worshipped the Lord on Sundays.¹⁵

The main part of the ritual of a Witches' Sabbath consisted of hymns and prayers addressed to the Devil.¹⁶ When the religious rites were ended, the feast commenced, all partaking of the choicest wines and the most delicious meats. Salt is said never to have been used in the witch ceremonies. The Devil, as heir of the ancient death-demons, appears in all European folk-lore as a hater of salt, the agent of preservation. Salt was used in the Middle Ages in the rites of exorcism. In the Catholic Church, a child is still given salt at baptism in order to drive out the Devil. "When I am at table and feel no hunger," we are told by Richalmus, a Cistercian monk, abbot of Schoenthal in Württemberg, who lived in the first part of the thirteenth century, "as soon as I take a little salt, the appetite, of which the Devil robbed me, returns; when my appetite disappears again after a while, I take salt again, and I am again hungry."

The feast was followed by lively dances accompanied by the music of violins, flutes, citterns, hautboys, tambourines and bagpipes. The feasts and dances led up to ecstasies and orgies of a rather promiscuous kind. It was believed that each and every witch had ceremonial union with the Devil, as her lord and master. These "Satanic stunts" reached their climax when "a Jew was married to a toad" (Alexander Pushkin: "The Hussar," 1833).

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The fact is worth noting that the church did not start its campaign of extermination against the witch-cult until the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁷ In the first centuries of the Christian era, the Church ignored this secret survival of ancient paganism and refused

¹⁵ The matter summarized in this paragraph has been taken chiefly from the books by Miss Murray and by Mr. Thompson. Cf. also the present writer's review of Mr. Thompson's book, which appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, of October, 1929.

¹⁶ The music of the Witches' Sabbath was probably not of the best. The choir could hardly be expected to be composed of trained and well modulated voices. In Victor Hugo's novel, *Han d'Islande* (1823), it is said that "Beelzebub's punishment is frightful indeed if he is condemned to hear the chorus of the women of Drontheim once a week."

¹⁷ Jules Michelet unhesitatingly asserted that the witch first appeared in the "age of despair" engendered by the gentry of the Church.

to put any credence in the confused mass of superstition that gathered around witchcraft as a nucleus. An episcopal document of the ninth century reprimanded the belief, current among credulous folk, in the nocturnal mid-air trips undertaken by wild women at the order of the Devil. It was not until several centuries afterwards that the Church revealed its full faith in these superstitions and persecuted all whom she suspected of participating in revels which she had previously declared to be sheer phantasms. "After the Church itself stiffened into a hierarchy," writes Gustav Freytag, "after the unlimited pretensions of the popes drove many a stout heart to heresy, after more than one nation became stultified under the domination of the mendicant friars, then this superstition gradually developed in the Church into a well-grounded and deep-rooted belief. Whatever passed as devilish was wiped out in bloody persecution."¹⁸

After the famous and fatal bull "Summis desiderantes" issued by Innocent VIII in 1484, a burning of witches began in all European countries that continued, with interruptions, until far into the eighteenth century. The witch-hunt abated somewhat during the Reformation period, Catholics and Protestants being then deeply engrossed in persecuting each other. It was, however, soon revived and raged with greater fury than ever. Catholics and Calvinists vied with each other in burning the greater number of witches for the greater glory of God. The Puritans carried the witch-hunt into the New World. The witch-hangings at Salem and in other American towns form a dark chapter in the history of the New Continent.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of a Cornelius Agrippa, a Johannes Wierus and a Friedrich Spe, the belief in witchcraft gradually disappeared in the various European countries. Holland abolished witch persecution in 1610; Geneva in 1632, Sweden in 1649, and England in 1682. The last judicial execution for witchcraft in Europe took place in Poland in 1793, when two old women were burned at the stake. In one European country, witchcraft still has a legal status. Ireland even now recognizes witchcraft as an offence against the law. In the Commission of Peace, the newly appointed magistrate is empowered to take cognizance, among other

¹⁸ Gustav Freytag, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

crimes, of "Witchcraft, Inchantment, Sorcery, Magic Arts."¹⁹

The belief in witchcraft, however, has not wholly disappeared even in the twentieth century. An unbelievably wide-spread condition of superstition and sorcery still exists in many European countries. It is generally known that faith in witchcraft and fear of the evil eye are prevalent among certain uneducated classes in small European towns. An incident that recently occurred at Bordeaux, in France, shows that the belief in witchcraft has made headway even in the advanced modern cities. In our own country, "Voodooism" is manifestly a lineal descendant of medieval witchcraft. The "hex murders" in a small Pennsylvania town not so long ago furnish sufficient proof that the witch, in the United States, has not passed out of the realm of belief with the Salem persecutions. Witchcraft, however, is not limited to remote towns in the United States. It has repeatedly come to light even in our centers of civilization. In New York, in Chicago and in most of the big cities of this country, there are thousands of persons, mostly of foreign extraction, who still believe in and practice the arts of witchcraft. The fear of the evil-eye, which prevails among many classes in our big cities, has been brought over primarily from Italy, where this superstition still counts thousands upon thousands of believers. In Naples, the *jettatore*, as the owner of the evil eye is called, is so feared that, at his approach, a street is rapidly emptied of men, women and children. In India, China, Turkey, and Greece, there exists a belief that the evil eye affects also horses and cattle. The persistence of the belief in the evil eye shows with what tenacity old beliefs and ancient superstitions will continue to exist through the ages.²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. St. John D. Seymour: *Irish Demonology and Witchcraft* (New York, 1913), p. 248.

²⁰ The matter of medieval witchcraft is avowedly treated summarily in this paper. The reader, who is interested in this subject, is referred to the works by Miss Murray and Mr. Thompson already mentioned, and especially to Professor G. L. Kittredge's thorough work *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, which has just been published. Among German studies on the subject we will mention the following: W. G. Söldan: *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse* (1843, 3. Aufl. 2 Bde. 1912); Johann Diefenbach: *Der Hexenwahn* (1886). A curious little book on the Witches' Sabbath is *le Sabbat des Sorciers* by Bourneville and E. Teinturier, which appeared in the *Bibliothèque diabolique* (2nd ed., 1890). Of particular interest is the book *Là-Bas* by the French novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans (1891), which was originally intended by its author as a serious study rather than a novel. In the journal *Echo de Paris*, where it first ran in serial form, it had as subtitle "Etude sur le satanisme." *Là-Bas* is a store-house of occult sciences. We learn in it all about ecclesiology, liturgy, astrology, theurgy, therapy, alchemy, sorcery, necromancy, sadism,

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Nor is devil-worship wholly extinct in modern times. Contemporary Satanism, however, is not historic, but eclectic. It is not directly connected with medieval witchcraft, although it borrowed many elements from the cult. In contrast to the medieval witch-cult, modern Satanism is practiced by the cultured classes in the European capitals. Huysmans in his novel *Là-Bas* affirms that "the cult of Satan still survives in France as in the other principal European countries and that it has not been unknown even in England during the past hundred years."²¹ The English critic, Mr. Arthur Symons, who certainly cannot be accused of credulity, maintains that "all but the most horrible practices of the sacrilegious magic of the Middle Ages are yet performed from time to time in a secrecy which is all but absolute."²² The Reverend Mr. Montague Summers likewise asserts that "Satanists yet celebrate the Black Mass in London, Brighton, Paris, Lyons, Bruges, Berlin, Milan, and alas! in Rome itself. . . . Often they seem to concentrate their vile energies in quiet cathedral cities of England, France and Italy."²³

Although Huysmans' presentation of modern Satanism is offered in the form of fiction, the impression must not be gained that it was evolved out of the author's imagination. As a naturalist, Huysmans relied for his material wholly on observation and documentation. He must have read hundreds of folios and collected mountains of notes in the preparation of his book, which Léon Bloy calls a cataclysm of documents. Huysmans supplemented his reading by personal observation. For several years previous to the publication of his novel, he zealously frequented the circles of the vampirism, incubism, succubism, and all other varieties of black magic, in addition to somewhat more conventional subjects, ranging from painting to cooking. In this book, we are also told the history of Gilles de Rais, who was a leader in the medieval witch-cult, we are instructed in regard to the meaning of the sacrifice of Melchisedek, and we are informed concerning the person of Antichrist and the teaching of Paracelsus. This frightful book, as it has aptly been called, also appeared a few years ago in this country in an abbreviated English translation but was driven under cover immediately upon its publication.

²¹ Huysmans reiterated his firm belief in the existence of the Satanic cult in the prefatory essay he contributed to Jules Bois's book, *le Satanisme et la magie* (1895).

²² Cf. Arthur Symons: *Figures of Several Centuries* (London, 1916), p. 296, and *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, 1919), p. 257.

²³ Montague Summers: *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*. London, 1926.

Rosicrucians, Illuminists,²⁴ spiritualists and other occultists of the type of the Marquis de Guaita, who, in 1888, founded the neo-Rosicrucian Society of Paris, and Joséphin Péladan, who assumed the title of Sar and who dabbled in all sorts of diabolism. The bulk of his information with regard to modern Satanism was furnished Huysmans by the ex-abbé Boullan, of Lyons, to whom he addressed himself in a letter during the preparation of his novel, stating that he wished proofs of Satanism "in order to be able to affirm that the Devil existed, that he reigned, that the power he had in the Middle Ages had not diminished and that he still was the absolute Master, the Omniarch." The ex-abbé, who figures in *Là-Bas* under the most flattering aspects as Dr. Johannès, an exorcist, was well competent to furnish the desired information, inasmuch as he himself committed the acts which he attributed to others. He hoodwinked Huysmans with regard to his own work, presenting himself as an exorcist and a victim of the machinations of certain unfrocked priests, to whom he ascribed the very deeds committed by himself. The principal proofs of the existence of a cult of Satan furnished by Boullan to Huysmans were the frequent thefts of consecrated wafers throughout France, which, as he maintained, were employed in the celebration of the Black Mass.

The description of the Black Mass, which forms the central episode of *Là-Bas* and which is so marvelously painted in all of its revolting details, has been derived from the manuals of the Inquisition and the reports of the parliamentarians, and supplemented by a study of the life of Vintras, a wonder-worker, who was charged by two former members of his sect with the celebration of the Black Mass.²⁵ Remy de Gourmont also helped the author in his documentation on the tradition of the Black Mass. But Gourmont soon lost interest in these investigations, having finally arrived at the conclusion that no such diabolical ceremony had ever been celebrated in the Middle Ages, and left Huysmans to construct

²⁴ The original "Illuminati" were a secret mystical sect which sprang up in Bavaria under the leadership of Adam Weishaupt in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and which found adherents also in France. Secret societies were extremely numerous in that country and "Illuminism" of various kinds took particular hold of men's minds during the period just prior to the Revolution. Cf. J. P. L. de la Roche du Moine, Marquis de Luchet: *Essai sur la secte des Illuminés*. Paris, 1789.

²⁵ On the machinations of Boullan and Vintras and other men of their stamp, see Jules Bois: *les Petites religions de Paris* (1894).

unaided the unsavory episodes of his novel.²⁶ Johanny Bricaud, who knew Huysmans personally, maintains, however, that the novelist actually assisted at a Black Mass in the rue de Sèvres, the street in which he lived,²⁷ although he may have drawn largely on his documentation for many of the most diabolical diversions connected with this ceremony. The reader cannot bring himself to believe that practices of this kind still exist in modern times—from the horrible profanation of the Eucharist, with which the Black Mass begins, to the atrocious and promiscuous orgies, with which it ends. It is also doubtful whether a woman of the type of Mme Chantelouve exists even in the Bohemian quarters of Paris. The contemporary cult of Satan is primarily a diabolism of debauchery. The principal part of the modern Black Mass consists of sexual perversions of all kinds. The materialist Des Hermies in *Là-Bas* reveals a deep insight into human nature when, with regard to Durtal's description of the Black Mass supposedly celebrated in Paris, he remarks: "Je suis sûr qu'en invoquant Belzébuth, ils pensent aux prélibations charnelles" (I am certain that in invoking Beelzebub, they only think of carnal prelibations).²⁸

Huysmans, following the lead of other ultra-Catholic writers, includes the Masons among the devil-worshippers in his novel

²⁶ Remy de Gourmont's essay on Huysmans' *Là-Bas* entitled "le Paganisme éternel" in his book of essays *la Culture des idées* (1900) is very interesting in the light of our discussion.

²⁷ Cf. Johanny Bricaud: *J. K. Huysmans et le Satanisme* (1913), p. 16.

²⁸ Mr. Harry Kemp, in an article contributed to the Sunday edition of the *New York World*, of August 2, 1914, described the activities of a Satanic cult in London, which he claimed had even spread to this country.

It is not the object of this article to go at length into the matter of modern devil-worship in France, but the reader, who is interested in this question, will find ample material in the following books and magazine articles: Alexandre Erdan: *la France mystique* (1853); Charles Sauvestre: *les Congrégations religieuses dévoilées* (1867); Stanislas de Guaita: *Essais de sciences maudites* (1886). M. Jules Bois, who is at present residing in the United States, has constituted himself the historian of modern Satanism by his book *les Petites religions de Paris* (1893) and especially by his study *le Satanisme et la magie* (1895). M. Bois's views on modern Satanism are detailed by Miss Marie A. Belloc in her interview with this French writer, which appeared under the title "Satanism: Ancient and Modern" in the London monthly magazine *The Humanitarian*, vol. XI (1897), pp. 81-7, and by Thomas Walsh in his article "The Amateurs of Satan" published in the *New York Bookman*, vol. IX (1899), pp. 220-23. M. Bois has in recent years found a competitor in R. Schwäblé, who has written the novel *Chez Satan: Roman de mœurs de satanistes contemporains* (1906) and the two studies *le Satanisme flagellé; Satanistes contemporains, incubat, succubat, sadisme et satanisme* (1912), and *Chez Satan, Pages à l'Index. Possession* (1913). Johanny Bricaud, author of *J. K. Huysmans et le satanisme* (1913), already mentioned, announced for publication a study, *le Satanisme contemporain*, which apparently has not yet appeared.

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Là-Bas. But especially in his preface to Jules Bois's study on Satanism, he expresses his belief that the Masons worship the Devil, although he calls them Luciferians in contrast to the Satanists and thus renders them slightly less odious than other devil-worshippers. The distinction between these two classes of diabolists consists in the fact that, while the Satanists worship the Devil as the spirit of evil, the Luciferians see in him the spirit of good. Huysmans has many surprises for the American reader. One may learn from him that devil-worship existed in our own country as well as in Europe, and that Americans were at the head of the two international associations for the Propagation of the Faith in the Prince of Darkness. Huysmans asserts that the "Ré-Theurgists-Optimates,"²⁹ founded in 1855, with headquarters in America, had for their Grand Master no less a person than the poet Longfellow, whose official title was "Grand-Prêtre du Nouveau Magisme Evocateur" (High Priest of the New Evocatory Sorcery).³⁰ At the head of the second diabolical organization in America stood the Southern poet General Albert Pike, who was called "le vicaire du Très-Bas, le pontife installé dans la Rome infernale" (The vicar of the Very-Low, the Pontiff installed in the Infernal Rome), by which infernal Rome was meant our good Southern town of Charleston, S. C. Albert Pike, together with the Mormon bishop John Taylor, is alleged to have introduced into France, in 1881, the so-called "Maçonnerie Palladique" (Palladic, *i. e.* Luciferian Masonry).³¹

The Catholics have always considered the Freemasons allies of the Devil. They are believed to have surrendered their souls to Satan, whom they worship in their rites and ceremonials. But, toward the end of the last century, Europe was literally flooded with accusations of devil-worship and immorality against the Masons. This occurred on the occasion of the papal encyclic "Humanum genus," in which the faithful were urged to "snatch from Free-

²⁹ This extraordinary phrase is, according to Mr. F. Legge, "apparently composed of three languages: Optimates is used by Cicero for the aristocratic, as opposed to the popular, party; Theurgos is a man who works wonders by means of the gods, . . . Ré is apparently the Egyptian sun-god Ra" ("Devil-worship and Freemasonry" in *The Contemporary Review*, vol. LXX [1896], p. 472, note).

³⁰ Huysmans innocently followed his authorities, who, curiously enough, confused the poet Longfellow with a Scotchman by the same name, who was said to have helped in the organization of the "New Reformed Palladium." Cf. Arthur Edward Waite: *Devil-Worship in France* (London, 1896), p. 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 ff.

masonry the mask with which it is covered, and to let it be seen what it really is." The ball was set rolling by Léo Taxil (pseud. of Gabriel-Jogand Pagès), who, in the very year of his conversion, gave to the world the first of his "complete revelations concerning Freemasonry," in two volumes called *The Brethren of the Three Points* (1884). This writer started his literary career as editor of *l'Anti-Clérical*, an anti-clerical paper of the lowest type, but later was converted, or reverted, to the faith of his childhood. He published his books under various pseudonyms in order to gain greater credence among his readers. He kept up this deception as long as he could, and, in the year 1897, on the eve of being exposed, publicly confessed that all his revelations about Masonic devil-worship were a hoax. Other books by this anti-Masonic writer are: *The Cult of the Grand Architect* (1886); *Sister Masons*, or *Ladies' Freemasonry* (1888); and *Are There Women in Freemasonry?* (1891). His novel, *The Devil in the Nineteenth Century*, appeared in serial form, in 1892-1895, under the pseudonym of Dr. Bataille. His *Memoirs of an ex-Palladist* were passed off as the work of an English lady, Miss Diana Vaughan, who claimed that she had seen Lucifer appearing at one of the meetings of a Masonic ladies' auxiliary as a very handsome young man, clad in a golden *maillot* and seated on a throne of diamonds.

This great accuser of the Masonic Brethren was followed by others, chief among whom were Mgr. Léon Meurin, S. J., archbishop of Port-Louis in Mauritius, author of the book entitled *The Freemasonry; The Synagogue of Satan* (1893), and Signor Domenico Margiotta, commander of a pontifical order, whose chief book of accusation against the Masons is named *The Palladism as Cult of Satan-Lucifer* (1895). Obviously Signor Margiotta does not uphold the distinction between Satanists and Luciferians marked by other writers. He received from the Pope the apostolic benediction for his denunciation of the Masons, his former associates. Other anti-Masonic writers were Paul Rosen, author of *Satan and Company* (1888), and Jean Koska (pseud. of Jules Doinel), who wrote a book with the significant title of *Lucifer Unmasked* (1895).³²

³² The reader who is interested in this Catholic-Masonic controversy, in addition to the writings of Legge and Waite already mentioned, is referred to the following books and magazine articles: Arthur Lillie: *The Worship of Satan in Modern France* (1896); Bräunlich: *Der neueste Teufelsschwandel* (1897); and Charles Henry: "Der entlarvte Lucifer" in the Stuttgart Socialist monthly *Die neue Zeit*, vol. XV (1897), II, pp. 490-98.